



Task Force Meeting #1

The first Visalia Civic Center Task Force took place on July 12, 2005. The meeting provided an opportunity for the Task Force to review the overall master planning approach, discuss strategic questions the master planning should address, and confirm the Draft Guiding Principles prepared with the City Council.

There were several overall themes that emerged from the Task Force discussion. These included observations about the planning of the community facilities; how the project is financed; how City property might be included in an asset management program for the civic center; and urban design.



Community Facilities

There were three areas of analysis that were discussed about the civic center facilities, particularly about how the community accesses local government. The Task Force took an “outside-in” perspective regarding how residents are served, the civic center as a place to gather, and plan design.

City Hall Customers

The Task Force wanted to explore ways to provide face-to-face access to “people with information” at the civic center. They felt you should be able to find what you need and that a clearinghouse function would help. Example access included:

- Attaining permits (streets, sewer, etc.);
- Ability to pick up printed materials and forms;
- Finding about programs (Park and Rec); and
- Talking to City staff (planning, public works, etc.).

In addition to face-to-face contact, the Task Force wanted to make sure that we consider how telecommunications supported civic center and community access to government services. Example access included:

- Adequate access to 911, fire and police services;
- Information center/clearinghouse phone-in help (to talk to a real person);
- Web-based tracking of permitting (a commercial grade solution);
- Access to city hall kiosks around the community that connected to city services (bilingual) and;
- Ability to download forms and reports.

Venue for Community Forums

The traditional meetinghouse function of city halls and civic centers was also identified as an area that the planning should focus on. How the community comes together to form policy was viewed as very important. Examples gathering activities included:

- Public meetings;
- City Council and commission meetings (and similar types of meetings with potential County and School District partners); and
- General Plan meetings.

Facility Design

There were several comments about how the master planning of facilities can improve community access. These included exploring ways to organize building to provide a logical flow and access.

Civic Center Financing and Asset Management

There were five areas of analysis discussed regarding how to pay for new civic center facilities. This included the types of partners the City could co-invest with, how the City's land can be used to help finance new facilities, reinvesting savings from new facilities, and specialized funding sources.

Public-Public Partnerships

The Task Force wanted to explore the mutual benefits of sharing civic center facilities with other government agencies. These included:

- Joint use of buildings;
- Co-location in the civic center on City land; and
- Shared parking.

Public-Private Partnerships

Including private sector partners was also an area that the Task Force wanted to explore. They felt there could be both economic development benefit and/or financial advantages by working with the private sector. Examples included:

- Private financing (lease purchase-type approach);
- Mixed-use (including commercial uses as tenants);
- Shared parking; and
- Shared infrastructure investment (streets and utilities).

Asset Management

Management of the City's real estate assets was viewed by the Task Force as a very central (and unique) opportunity to feature in a financing strategy. Analysis of financing the Civic Center should include:

- Sale or leasing of City-owned land in the East Downtown;
- Sale or lease of other land (old city hall, corporation yard, etc.); and
- Benefit of continued investment and purchase of land.

Savings

Dedicating savings accomplished through development of a new civic center was another area of inquiry suggested by the Task Force. This could include:

- Reductions in redundant staffing due to multiple city locations;
- Time savings for staff (efficient workplace and adjacencies);
- Reduced cost in operation of older, less efficient buildings; and
- Savings due to an economy-of-scale (parking, public spaces and office spaces).

Specialized Funding Sources

In addition to traditional funding sources, the Task Force wanted to know what types of more specialized grant sources might exist: Examples included:

- Transportation funding (streets, pedestrian enhancements, parking, etc.);
- Waterways (for civic center park and Mill Creek); and
- Infrastructure grants.

Urban Design

The design of the civic center in the context of the future reinvestment in East Downtown was another theme. Areas of desired analysis included how the new Civic Center could:

- Reflect the community's identity;
- Have an appropriate scale and density for such an important site;
- Have a design that is timeless;
- Create overall design features that "fit it" into the East Downtown;
- Encourage civic interaction;
- Result in active community spaces (squares, parks and plazas); and
- Reflect the regional's natural (oaks and water) and climatic setting.